

VZCZCXRO3143
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHAM #0155/01 0160553
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 160553Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1504
INFO RUEHJK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000155

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STATE FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/PPD, IIP/GNEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [JO](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN MEDIA REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Jordanian press commentary has focused this past week on President Bush's visit to the region and his meetings with Arab and Israeli leaders. Opinions in Jordanian editorials were mixed. While there was praise for the symbolism of the President's visit, particularly to the West Bank, as a step forward, most columnists expressed the need for tangible change to the status quo, and lamented the perceived U.S. "bias" in favor of Israel on the core issues. Columnists generally agreed that a viable peace cannot be established without greater American "pressure" on Israel. Headlines on the front pages of the major dailies were generally neutral in tone, and most major newspapers carried positive statements by the GOJ regarding telephone conversations between the President and King Abdullah regarding the Arab-Israeli peace process. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Editorial Commentary.

--"Collapse of the Palestinian State Project Under the American Vision"

The masthead editorial in the January 12 edition of the pro-government, pro-Palestinian Arabic daily "Ad-Dustour" criticized the visit: "The U.S. President's visit to the area caused a state of strong pessimism, as the U.S. administration unveiled its Palestinian State project, as it wants it and sees it, through the establishment of a Palestinian State, while practically speaking, the majority of the settlements remain, the right to return is demolished, and Israel is recognized as a Jewish state... The U.S. President's statements are very dangerous, and reveal the headlines of the U.S.-Israeli project, which the Palestinian Authority.... Who is going to be able to give up the right to return, and who would be able to shift the right to return from the original place to an alternative one, from the 1948 Palestine to the West Bank. Who has the right to create a smaller homeland in front of the big one?! It is most likely that the peace process will collapse in the next few months, and it is clear that Israel today has two choices only: the first is to clean up Israel from the other on an ethnic and religious basis, and to implement the project mentioned previously... or it [Israel] would isolate the West Bank and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State and continue the occupation of Jerusalem, looking for a legal and political loophole to push the 1948 Palestinians for immigration outside their lands."

--"Commitment Needed"

The small-circulation, elite English daily "Jordan Times" editorialized on January 13: "U.S. President George W. Bush's visit to Israel and Palestine achieved little tangible progress, but cemented U.S. positions on certain key issues. It is clear to most in the region that Washington does not feel bound by the 1967 borders as anything other than a guideline, and that 'necessary' adjustments, in the America view, have to be made. It is clear that the issue of Palestinian refugees cannot, according to Washington, be solved by adhering to their right of return to the land they were forcefully expelled from, but rather must be solved in the context of international compensation and a "return" to a future Palestinian

state. It is also clear that the U.S. is, above all, committed to Israel's security, but it wants to see settlement outposts removed and sees, like everybody else, that contiguity of the territory of a Palestinian state is vital.... Of more immediate concern is the effect of these positions on the Palestinian Authority (PA), led by Mahmoud Abbas.... The PA's impressive Reform and Development Plan that was presented to donors in Paris makes one thing abundantly clear: If Israeli-imposed closures in the West Bank do not end, no amount of generosity will see the creation of viable institutions or a viable economy. And that way leads to absolute disaster. The status quo simply does not cut it. It [the status quo] undermines every effort the PA makes (in addition to amounting to criminal collective punishment by an occupying power; in clear contravention to Geneva resolutions) and undermines negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians. Bush missed an excellent chance to actually move the process forward. If it is not simply to grind to a halt, the U.S. needs to show much greater commitment, not only to its own position, but to international law as well."

--"Encouraging"

Columnist Walid M. Sadi wrote on January 13 in the "Jordan Times" that he considered the President's visit to the region "encouraging." Sadi wrote: "The inside story [of the visit] could be more promising and revealing. For starters, most probably Bush expressed to the two leaders [Olmert and Abbas] his exasperation with the protracted peace process, and wants the two sides to be more forthcoming in their peace talks. No more foot dragging, could be the warning issued by Bush to the two leaders. No more excuses for delaying major decisions, could be another stern warning from the U.S. president. The two leaders Bush met during his working visit must have got, therefore, the clear message that he is fed up with the pace of the peace process. Not less important is the possibility that the confidential talks held by Bush with the two leaders contained more substance than disclosed in public during the

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press conferences. And when all is said and done, there is no doubt that the symbolism of Bush's trip to the Palestinian territories cannot be underestimated. The visit to the heartland of the Palestinian territories is tantamount to a recognition of the Palestinians as a people with a legitimate quest for statehood and independence. This is, after all, the first time ever that a U.S. president has visited the West Bank in modern times. It is also noteworthy that the press conference held with Abbas ended on an upbeat note. Bush said he is sure that a Palestinian state will emerge, and a peace treaty between the Palestinians and Israelis will be concluded during his term in office. These are very comforting and promising words and their realization indeed brings peace to the Palestinians and Israelis alike. Bush's second visit to Israel and the West Bank, planned for April, is a show of determination to follow through with his initiative to attain peace between Israel and the Palestinians before the end of his term at the White House."

--"The Important Thing After Insulting"

Columnist Saleh Gallab wrote in the leading, government-owned Arabic daily broadsheet "Al Rai" on January 15 that observers should find what he described as a "middle ground" when looking to the President's visit to the region and its outcomes. "The U.S. President George Bush deserves more than insult for being an Israeli lover and strategic ally... the answer for the Americans' question to the Arabs 'Why do you hate us?' is: 'Because you hate us.' [But] when Bush announced while standing between Shimon Perez and Ehud Olmert that Israelis occupy others' lands and they have to withdraw from others' land and that the settlements must stop, the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state that lives side by side with Israel is inevitable. The Palestinians and the Arabs... must encourage the U.S. President and any future President to make such steps in this direction. There is no way to change the current status of the (more than strategic and more than divine) ties between Israel and U.S. administration, and any U.S. administration, in a very short time. This needs generations of struggle and requires a change among the Arabs, hence it is not right to turn our back to the conflict and keep on insulting Bush."

--"Secular Palestine to Confront the Jewish Israel"

Senior columnist Nahed Hattar called for a "new Arab strategy" in response to the visit in the January 13 edition of the independent, opposition Arabic daily "Al-Arab Al-Yawn." "After the American admission that Israel is a Jewish state, we can say that all the legends that established the peace process on the Palestinian side have completely collapsed... with 'Jewish Israel' we are confronting a solid ideological belief that is outside the negotiations process.

We are then at the right moment to establish a new basis for the Arab-Israeli conflict. This basis needs a new strategic vision of the Arab and Palestinian leaderships. For confronting the new Israeli strategy, we need to produce a new Arab strategy, and I see this strategy's main points as the following: First, establishing a 'secular Palestinian state' that would stand in the face of the 'Jewish state in Israel.' Second, this strategy would stress the political and peaceful struggle by the Palestinian society, one which has international support and is consistent with international traditions in fighting discrimination. Third, if the Palestinian authorities do not follow this option then the Arab world's authorization to the Palestinian Authority to manage the negotiations that tackle refugee issues, security, and borders will be withdrawn."

--"Bush's Divine Vision: A Gift to the Extremism Axis and a Painful Slap to the Arab Ally"

Independent journalist Rana Sabbagh struck a more critical note in a January 13 piece in "Al-Arab Al-Yawn." "President George Bush's tour in the Palestinian lands and Israel has made things clear in connection to his desire to impose peace and establish the basis for a 'Palestinian state of some kind' while taking care of Israel's interest even if this would hurt U.S. Arab allies who are committed to peace as the only strategy... Thank God, the presidential visit took place because it ended the illusion of peace by any value resulting from the Annapolis conference... which was under the sponsorship of one man who wants to introduce himself as the awaited peace leader before the end of his term in 12 months. To achieve Bush's promise, the U.S. administration will move within the 2004 letter of guarantees to then Prime Minister Sharon, which Jordan has criticized strongly."

--"The End of Dividing Arabs into Moderate and Extremists"

Columnist Jamal Tahat in the independent, pro-business Arabic daily "Al Ghad" wrote on January 14: "The U.S. logic in its relations with the Arab countries has led to the dividing of these countries into moderates and extremists. This division reflected the Cold War coalitions. After the end of the Cold War, the world maintained the map of regional power relations, which was drafted during the Cold War era. The September 11, 2001 events, the occupation of Iraq, and

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the results of the Israeli aggression against Lebanon in 2006 led to what might be called the beginning of efforts to clean up the world's view regarding the region from the remnants of Cold War logic. These shifts should stop Jordanian attempts to talk about two Arab camps (moderates and extremists). It is possible to say that continuing this kind of debate will leave Jordan a hostage to one regional power, and prevent our foreign policy from serving national Jordanian interests in an objective way. Insisting on the dividing logic between the extremist Arabs and the moderate ones is a reflection of a disabled diplomatic institution in responding to changes."

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